



CHANGING WIC, CHANGING LIVES

TRANSITIONING TO HEALTHY EATING AND ACTIVE LIVING



A Framework for
Activating Obesity
Prevention Strategies
in California WIC





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CHANGING WIC, CHANGING LIVES: SUMMARY



With its broad participant base, proven effectiveness, and widespread support, WIC is a critical player in California's efforts to improve health. In 2004-2005, the California WIC Community came together to examine how WIC can harness its historic success as a nutrition program in order to deal with an emerging public health crisis: obesity. Understanding the potential consequences of an unchecked epidemic on the WIC population, the California WIC Association and the Department of Health Services WIC Program launched "Changing WIC, Changing Lives," a six-month rapid planning effort.

The goal of the process was not to create a complex, systemwide strategic plan, but simply to map out a policy blueprint, or menu of policy approaches, for shaping California WIC's direction and priorities for obesity prevention in the coming decade. After gathering input from all relevant sectors of the California Department of Health Services, as well as from other state and local government and community stakeholders, a group of WIC managers and others, with support from the Prevention Institute, produced a simple Framework. That Framework is presented in this document.

The Framework focuses on redefining WIC approaches and re-tooling program operations in order to concentrate on healthy eating and active living. The intent of the Framework is to ensure that California WIC will continue to be as effective in fighting obesity as it has been in preventing hunger, promoting breastfeeding, and fighting poverty.

This document summarizes the Framework and updates our progress on transitioning California WIC to meet the new challenges facing our families and our program. It details four elements that, together, are key to

inspiring both WIC staff and WIC families to make healthier eating and activity choices. In addition, it sets out a vigorous policy agenda that WIC and allied advocates are already pursuing to make healthy choices easier and more affordable in the low-income and diverse communities we serve.

Guided by the Spectrum of Prevention, a community-based, multi-level tool for effecting change, the Framework focuses on four key areas:

- Encouraging breastfeeding and appropriate infant/toddler feeding
- Making regular physical activity the norm for WIC families
- Ensuring access to healthy food and healthcare
- Promoting healthy eating

Detailed strategies and action proposals for each of these areas are presented in this report.

The Framework also provides concrete recommendations for action in two WIC arenas: seeking policy and organizational changes while improving direct education and training. Coordinated and well-timed efforts in both of these arenas simultaneously will make it easier and more affordable for WIC families to engage in healthy eating and active living. This is what it will take to prevent obesity.

Since 2005, state and local WIC providers have been using this Framework to set long-term strategy, conduct operations planning, and to prioritize funding decisions. Updates on WIC's progress in transitioning toward prevention based on the Framework are in the final section of this report.

We look forward to working with our many partners to ensure that California WIC continues to lead the nation in strategic approaches to public health challenges—and gets the results that our participants need and our stakeholders expect.



SOURCE DOCUMENTS

Transitioning to Obesity Prevention: Harnessing WIC's Success to Promote Healthy Eating and Active Living, Prevention Institute, 2005

Transitioning to Obesity Prevention: Summary of Recommendations in Key Areas, WIC Stakeholder Group, 2005



WIC is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. This 100% federally funded program serves women and their children up to the age of five who are at-risk and low income (up to 185% of the federal poverty level).

The program is unique among federally administered food assistance programs in that it provides specific nutritious food prescriptions – WIC checks, redeemable at grocery stores – to a target population as an adjunct to ongoing health care. Basic nutrition education, along with breastfeeding promotion and support, are core WIC services. Another primary goal of the program is to facilitate access to preventive health and social services.

In California WIC, with a nutrition services budget of \$231 million and a food budget of \$948 million, including the federal grant and rebate revenue, 82 local agencies serve about 1.38 million participants each month at 671 local centers. Almost 60% of all infants born in California receive WIC services. Participants redeem WIC checks at nearly 4,000 grocery stores statewide. The majority



of participants are Latino (75%), followed by Caucasian (12%), African American (6.5%), Asian (6%), and Native American (0.5%). According to state estimates, 400,000 individuals are eligible, but remain unserved by WIC.

Most California WIC participants struggle with poverty (1.1 million live at or below 130% of poverty), and most WIC families work at one or more low-wage jobs. Many young WIC families are immigrants, migrant or seasonal farmworkers, or from special populations living in Indian rancherias, refugee enclaves, and inner-city neighborhoods. Some 23,000 are teen parents; other WIC participants are in foster care or are homeless.

While 93% of WIC participants state that they are enrolled in (or pending enrollment in) some form of health care, only about 10% are using CalWORKS (TANF) and only 17% receive Food Stamps. It appears that many more are eligible but not enrolled in these safety net programs.

About 17.5% of WIC participants are overweight or obese. The obesity rate has risen sharply in the past decade, and rates of obesity-related illness, such as Type II diabetes and heart disease, are also increasing even among

young children. Despite steady declines for decades, an unacceptable number of WIC participants still have low blood iron. Other nutrition-related problems seen in the WIC population include severe tooth decay, inadequate intake of fruits and vegetables, and generally poor diets.

Despite WIC's emphasis and progress on exclusive breastfeeding, hospital, family and community support for breastfeeding remains a challenge, and breastfeeding rates among WIC women are low. While 66.5% of WIC moms initiate breastfeeding at least partially in the hospital, only 15% are exclusively breastfeeding by the time their babies are two months old.*

*All WIC participant data drawn from California WIC Program database, 2006, except breastfeeding initiation rates in hospital, which are taken from Ross Laboratories Infant Feeding Survey, 2004.

CHANGING WIC, **CHANGING LIVES**
SUMMARY OF KEY APPROACHES:
FOUR AREAS OF FOCUS

REDUCING AND PREVENTING
CHILDHOOD OBESITY WILL TAKE
POLICY AND ORGANIZATIONAL
CHANGES AS WELL AS EDUCATION
SO PEOPLE CAN MAKE BETTER
CHOICES ABOUT WHAT
THEY EAT AND ABOUT
THEIR PHYSICAL
ACTIVITY. FOUR
ELEMENTS ARE
KEY TO MAKING
PROGRESS.



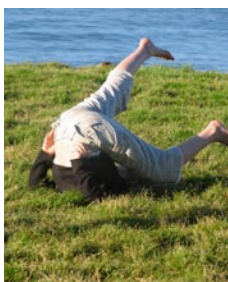
1 ENCOURAGING BREASTFEEDING AND APPROPRIATE INFANT/TODDLER FEEDING



Breast milk is rich in nutrients, provides protection against many common childhood ailments, and is a proven practice for setting a foundation for healthy eating and obesity prevention at all stages of childhood. The goal of this strategic area is to promote exclusive breastfeeding as the norm and to support informed and appropriate complementary infant and toddler feeding.



2 MAKING REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY THE NORM FOR WIC FAMILIES



Physical activity, including more movement and less sitting in daily living, are key elements in preventing obesity. The goal of this strategic area is to promote and support increased physical activity and active living as the norm for WIC families.

3 ENSURING ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD AND HEALTHCARE



In order to make healthier choices, families need to have access to affordable food and a source of comprehensive healthcare. Many WIC families are eligible but not participating in available nutrition assistance and health programs due to confusing rules and bureaucratic hurdles. Cost and availability influence choices about food and healthcare as much as custom. The goal of this strategic area is to ensure access to healthy foods among WIC families and continue work on using WIC as a gateway to healthcare.

4 ENSURING PROMOTING HEALTHY EATING



Families can benefit from education and support on how to eat a more healthful diet and make more informed choices when it comes to what foods to buy and how to prepare them. The goal of this strategic area is to promote healthy eating for families to prevent obesity and improve health.

WORKING ON TWO LEVELS: POLICY AND EDUCATION

ACTIONS MUST TAKE PLACE ON TWO LEVELS: SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE POLICIES THAT AFFECT CHOICES IN EATING AND ACTIVITY, AND PROVIDING EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR WIC STAFF AND WIC PARTICIPANTS.



1 POLICY AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

WIC will support the following types of federal, state and organizational policies to promote healthier eating and physical activity for each of the four areas of focus.

BREASTFEEDING AND EARLY FEEDING

- Include issues related to breastfeeding, infant formula and the role of industry marketing in campaigns targeting marketing of unhealthy foods
- Provide leadership to the breastfeeding community to develop a policy agenda
- Support the implementation of model breastfeeding policies in hospitals to encourage hospitals to promote exclusive breastfeeding
- Explore the role of local agency policies and practices to support exclusive breastfeeding

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND ACTIVE LIVING

- Support statewide policies that will address liability concerns for staff and participants to decrease barriers to conducting WIC-sponsored physical activity programs

- Develop and implement a physical activity component of an employee wellness program to enhance employee fitness and increase their effectiveness as role models

ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS AND HEALTHCARE

- Advocate for a streamlined application process in all federal nutrition programs
- Build WIC funding and capacity to act as a gateway to healthcare enrollment and utilization
- Advocate for WIC food package changes
- Advocate for WIC to expand the definition of authorized vendors to include certified farmers markets

HEALTHY EATING AMONG WIC FAMILIES

- Support federal and/or state legislation that institutes or expands nutrition education for low-income children, youth, and families
- Establish worksite wellness policies and practices that promote healthy options for staff and WIC participants
- Work with WIC grocers to address the placement of junk food products in stores





2 ENHANCED EDUCATION AND TRAINING



WIC will undertake the following key education and training activities to support each of the four areas of focus.

PROVIDE WIC FAMILIES WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TO MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES

WIC program staff will encourage healthy habits and provide WIC families with the information and skills to make healthy choices at WIC sites, through the media, and through other key community institutions.

- Conduct public education campaigns that include appropriate early feeding messages
- Inform participants about existing laws and resolutions in support of breastfeeding
- Educate WIC participants about local grocery store options and community food resources including, for example, food stamps, school meals, and senior meal programs
- Equip WIC participants with the skills to advocate for community change that will make healthy choices more accessible
- Build the skills of WIC families to select, purchase, and prepare healthy meals on a budget

EDUCATE WIC STAFF

To enhance WIC staff's pivotal role in providing information, skills, and motivation to participants, strengthening training for WIC staff is essential. Front-line staff need to be well-informed about key issues of nutrition and physical activity as well as about effective techniques for individual and group education. WIC staff also need to be encouraged to adopt healthy practices in their own families and to model these healthy habits.

- Develop and share unified nutrition and physical activity messages within WIC
- Equip WIC staff with the skills to advocate for policies and organizational changes in all the areas of focus

- Strengthen training to front-line staff so they can effectively include education about breastfeeding, infant feeding, physical activity, weight, and nutrition in their encounters with participants

- Educate WIC staff in motivational counseling techniques to give WIC participants the space to voice what they really feel and need and support their behavior change

- Use the “promotora” (peer counseling) model to promote education about nutrition and physical activity

- Train peer counselors and promotoras to assist families with making healthy choices

EDUCATING COMMUNITY HEALTH PROVIDERS

WIC families will benefit from consistent information and from hearing behavioral messages reinforced. There are a number of service providers that consistently interact with WIC participants and provide information about nutrition or physical activity. These include health care providers as well as Head Start and other preschool programs. WIC will ensure these providers have access to accurate information and effective techniques for working with families to improve eating and activity habits.

- Share current American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), and other guidelines for early feeding with health care providers

- Share appropriate educational materials along with screening and motivational tools

- Develop and share unified messages about nutrition and physical activity

- Collaborate with community health providers on staff training





CHANGING WIC, CHANGING LIVES AND THE SPECTRUM OF PREVENTION

THE FULL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EACH AREA OF FOCUS IN THE CAMPAIGN ARE ORGANIZED ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES USING THE SPECTRUM OF PREVENTION FRAMEWORK, A TOOL TO ENSURE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACHES TO PREVENTION. THE SPECTRUM'S SIX COMPLEMENTARY LEVELS, USED TOGETHER, PRODUCE GREATER EFFECTIVENESS THAN WOULD BE POSSIBLE BY IMPLEMENTING ANY SINGLE ACTIVITY.



6

INFLUENCING POLICY
AND LEGISLATION

Developing strategies to strengthen laws and policies that promote healthy eating and active living.

5

CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL
PRACTICES

Adopting regulations and shaping norms to promote healthy eating and active living.

4

FOSTERING COALITIONS
AND NETWORKS

Bringing together groups and individuals for broader goals and greater impact on promoting healthy eating and active living.

3

EDUCATING PROVIDERS

Informing providers who will transmit skills and knowledge to others to promote healthy eating and active living.

2

PROMOTING COMMUNITY
EDUCATION

Reaching groups of people with information and resources to promote healthy eating and active living.

1

STRENGTHENING INDIVIDUAL
KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Enhancing an individual's capability for healthy eating and active living.

For more detail on the Spectrum of Prevention, go to http://www.preventioninstitute.org/tool_spectrum.html



FOUR STRATEGIC AREAS

STRATEGIC AREA 1: ENCOURAGING BREASTFEEDING AND APPROPRIATE INFANT/TODDLER FEEDING

Breast milk is rich in nutrients, provides immune protection, and is a proven practice for setting a foundation for healthy eating and preventing obesity at all stages of childhood. The goal of this strategic area is to promote exclusive breastfeeding as the norm and to support informed and appropriate complementary infant and toddler feeding.

STRATEGIC AREA 2: MAKING REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY THE NORM FOR WIC FAMILIES

Physical activity and active living are key for preventing obesity. The goal of this strategic area is to promote and support increased physical activity and active living as the norm for WIC families.

Spectrum of Prevention Level	Recommendations	Recommendations
6 Influencing Policy and Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide leadership to the breastfeeding community to develop a long-term policy agenda ■ Include issues related to breastfeeding, infant formula and the role of industry marketing in campaigns targeting marketing of unhealthy foods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support statewide legislation that will address liability concerns for staff and participants to decrease barriers to conducting WIC- sponsored physical activity programs
5 Changing Organizational Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support the implementation of model breastfeeding policies in hospitals to encourage hospitals to promote exclusive breastfeeding ■ Explore the role of local agency policies and practices supporting exclusive breastfeeding ■ Promote and support lactation accommodation in low-wage worksites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop and implement a physical activity component of an employee wellness program to enhance employee fitness and increase their effectiveness as role models
4 Fostering Coalitions and Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Engage key strategic partners including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ State Department of Health Services Breastfeeding Promotion Advisory Committee and Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health ■ State and local Breastfeeding Coalitions and First 5 Commissions ■ AAP and other statewide public health organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Work with key strategic partners in physical activity promotion efforts, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ State Agencies such as DHS, CDE and State Parks ■ WIC parent organizations ■ Medical community ■ Local parks and recreation departments
3 Educating Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Strengthen all early feeding trainings provided to WIC front line staff ■ Share current American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), and other guidelines for early feeding with providers ■ Equip WIC staff and medical providers with early feeding messages and screening tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assist WIC staff, the medical community, and other providers to competently include physical activity promotion in their participant encounters
2 Promoting Community Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Expand the use of peer counselors/promotoras to assist families with early feeding options ■ Conduct public education campaigns with appropriate early feeding messages ■ Expand website resources on early feeding for staff and participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Inform the community of WIC's new capacity to serve as a resource for physical activity education and support ■ Inform WIC participants and staff of community events and resources that support a new emphasis on physical activity
1 Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Review and update the WIC Nutrition Assistance (WNA) manual and other training support from the WIC Program to reflect the current science with respect to early feeding ■ Utilize motivational interviewing encounters for breastfeeding, toddler, and infant feeding encounters ■ Inform participants about existing laws and resolutions in support of breastfeeding in public and at work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure the promotion of physical activity in both group and individual educational encounters ■ Assess the built environment to promote physical activity

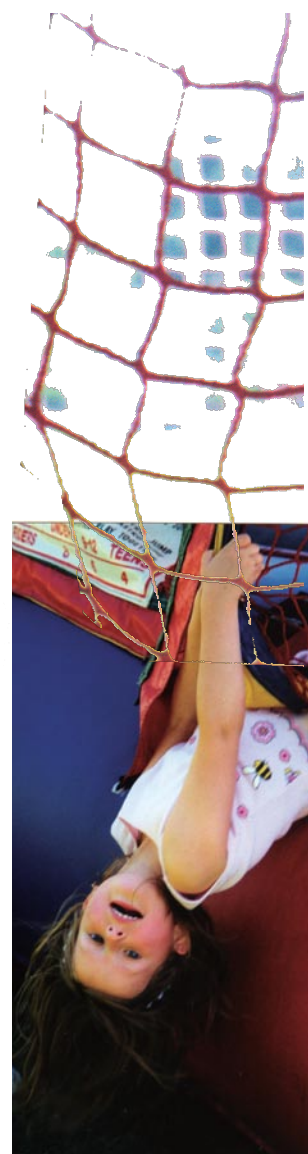
STRATEGIC AREA 3: ENSURING ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD AND HEALTHCARE

In order to make healthier choices, families need to have access to affordable food and a source of comprehensive healthcare. Many WIC families are eligible, but not participating in available nutrition assistance and health insurance programs due to confusing rules and bureaucratic hurdles. The goal of this strategic area is to ensure access to healthy foods among WIC families, and continue work on using WIC as a gateway to healthcare.

STRATEGIC AREA 4: PROMOTING HEALTHY EATING

Families can benefit from education and support on how eat a more healthful diet and make more informed choices when it comes to what foods to buy and how to prepare them. The goal of this strategic area is to promote healthy eating as the norm for families to prevent obesity and improve health.

Recommendations	Recommendations
<p>6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for a streamlined application process in all federal nutrition programs Advocate for WIC food package changes and work to include farmer's markets as authorized vendors Streamline the linkages between WIC and healthcare programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support federal and/or state legislation that institutes or expands nutrition education for low-income children, youth, and families Support legislation that improves food quality and nutrition information offered by schools, child care programs, and local restaurants
<p>5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on existing partnerships with WIC vendors at state and local levels to foster excellent customer service for WIC participants Work with WIC vendors to expand healthy food choices and improve product placement especially in low-income neighborhoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish worksite wellness policies and practices that promote healthy options for staff and WIC participants Work with WIC grocers to address the placement and marketing of junk food products that appeal to very young children
<p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage key strategic partners including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WIC- authorized vendors and non-WIC food vendors Federal nutrition programs and local emergency food programs Hunger and health access coalitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage key strategic partners including the Strategic Alliance, the Governor's Office, and other state agencies
<p>3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with WIC grocers on WIC nutrition education initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and share unified nutrition and health messaging within WIC and with WIC partners such as the Nutrition Network and child nutrition programs Build WIC staff skills and confidence in addressing issues of weight and health with overweight participants Collaborate with other health and nutrition programs to train staff on nutrition counseling protocols
<p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand WIC and other federal nutrition program outreach and referral with more community partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminate coordinated nutrition education messages, materials, and techniques to community-based organizations that also serve WIC families
<p>1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate WIC participants on available community food and healthcare resources, and support their efforts to apply for them Educate WIC families on local options to purchase healthier foods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build concrete skills of WIC families to select, purchase, prepare, provide healthy meals on a budget Equip WIC participants with the skills to advocate for community change that will make healthy choices more accessible





WHAT HAVE WE ACCOMPLISHED?

The intent of this Policy Framework is to ensure that WIC will be as effective in fighting obesity as it has been in preventing hunger, promoting breastfeeding, and fighting poverty. Since the Framework was completed in 2005, state and local California WIC providers, working with each other and with strategic partners, have already begun the work of transitioning WIC toward our goal. Achieving the transition has meant changing the way we work, both

personally and programmatically, so that we are promoting and supporting healthy eating and active living in everything we do. Here is a sampling of some of our early progress in this exciting WIC evolution.

USING THE FRAMEWORK FOR HEALTH PLANNING

The new WIC Framework became a key building block in broader governmental planning to prevent obesity. Most notably, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger referred to the WIC framework when he released his Obesity





<http://www.nwica.org>

http://www.calwic.org/new_food.aspx



WHAT HAVE WE ACCOMPLISHED? (CONTINUED)



EASIER SHOPPING FOR WIC PARTICIPANTS

In fall 2006, California WIC implemented major changes that will make shopping for WIC foods easier. Instead of having to redeem all checks at a single store, WIC participants can shop around, using each check at any California-authorized WIC store. In addition, prices are no longer printed on the checks, so participants just have to look for what to buy and how much to buy of each item printed on their checks.

For more information:

<http://www.wicworks.ca.gov/grocers/VendorNews.asp>



RE-BRANDING WIC

California WIC has a colorful new logo and tagline, "Families Grow Healthy with WIC." The new look will help families identify WIC-authorized stores, where WIC grocers are using the logo on bright "shelf-talkers" that clearly denote WIC-authorized foods. Re-branding will assist WIC to position itself as a key driver in improving family nutrition and health.

For more information:

<http://www.wicworks.ca.gov>

WIC WALKS THE TALK PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CAMPAIGN

In 2003, the California WIC Association launched a systemwide campaign entitled WIC Walks the Talk to encourage physical activity and healthy lifestyles among the 3,000 staff who work in WIC. Any type of physical activity is acknowledged in this program, and step counters and incentives are used to tabulate and reward involvement. Employees have mapped out virtual trips to distant places and celebrated their "arrival" with fun and healthy events. The program is still going strong, helping front-line staff to model healthy behavior for WIC participants—who watch what we do.

For more information:

<http://www.calwic.org/walktalk.aspx>



INNOVATIONS IN NUTRITION EDUCATION

The California WIC program has completely overhauled and revitalized its approach to nutrition education. Long dietary questionnaires and top-down classroom lectures are a thing of the past. Motivational interviewing and learner-centered, participatory approaches, such as dialogue groups and hands-on skill-building activities have replaced them. WIC materials have been refreshed and updated to reflect new science in early feeding and obesity prevention. WIC nutrition education topics are increasingly available to local WIC staff (and other users) in ready-to-use thematic campaign kits, such as the new Market to Meals menu planning and smart shopping campaign. Many agencies are now testing new technologies such as telephone support and computer kiosks.

For more information:

http://www.wicworks.ca.gov/education/education_index.html





BREASTFEEDING REFORMS AND IMPROVEMENTS

Breastfeeding is a key obesity-prevention strategy, and WIC is the leader in supporting low-income women who are determined to breastfeed despite many environmental challenges. Federal funds are now supporting a small cadre of Breastfeeding Peer Counselors, who are making a real difference in increasing the number of mothers who stick with breastfeeding longer. CWA is working to expand the proven success of Peer Counseling with state legislation. Breastfeeding advocates, supported by CWA, are using existing data to highlight the need to improve hospital policies in order to increase rates of exclusive breastfeeding. Worksite lactation accommodation, supported in many instances with WIC-loaned breastpumps, is another frontier where progress is slowly being made.

For more information:

<http://www.wicworks.ca.gov/breastfeeding/BFResources.html>

<http://www.calwic.org/bfreport.aspx>

STRONGER LINKAGES TO HEALTHCARE AND FOOD STAMPS

Many local WIC programs are working with Food Stamp advocates and their local social services departments to increase access to Food Stamp assistance. Outstationing eligibility workers in busy WIC waiting rooms is a common approach, which has been successful in increasing Food Stamp uptake in Sonoma, Los Angeles, and Alameda counties. In 2006, Governor Schwarzenegger signed SB 437 (Escutia) authorizing the development of a system that will improve WIC's ability to help eligible uninsured participants begin the healthcare enrollment process while they apply for WIC. If funded by the Legislature in 2007, this new "gateway" will greatly strengthen WIC's linkage to Medi-Cal and Healthy Families.



SIXTY PERCENT OF INFANTS
BORN IN CALIFORNIA ARE
WIC BABIES.



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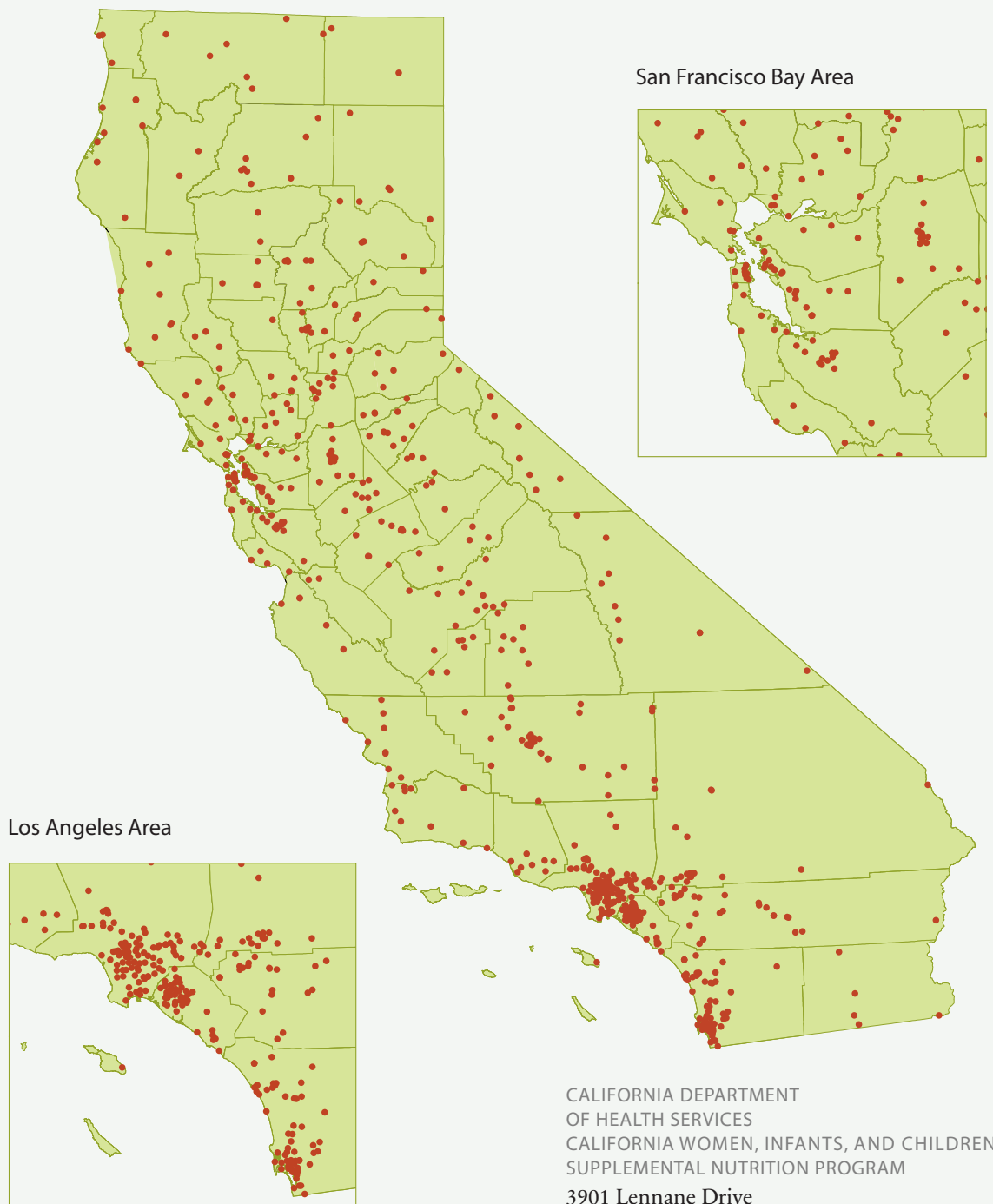
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WIC PROGRAMS IN CALIFORNIA



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San Francisco Bay Area

WIC, the California Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program, helps pregnant women, new mothers, and young children eat well and stay healthy.

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CALIFORNIA WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN
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